

The nature of the struggle

"Forces working for violent confrontation are often rewarded with Christian acclaim..."

Churchmen who felt personally constrained to support violence in South Africa should add courage to their convictions and "cross the lines" to administer to people in insurgent camps, Chief M G Buthelezi told the Archbishop of Canterbury in a meeting at Lambeth Palace recently.

Discussing the nature of the struggle for liberation in South Africa and the role of Churches, Chief Buthelezi said he felt "the Church's witness must be an open witness..."

As a Christian he had no problem in accepting that some churchmen in South Africa felt constrained by their conscience and convictions to involve themselves in violence.

"I understand that God is with the oppressed and in an unjust war Christ is equally present on both sides of the firing lines," he said.

However those churchmen in South Africa who felt personally constrained to support violence should add courage to their convictions and cross the lines to administer to people in insurgent camps.

"They should venture out into the world and persuade international Christendom to support violence," he said.

"For me there is something hypocritically dishonest about unstated commitments to violence and about conferring and negotiating with agents of violence beyond the sight and hearing of ordinary congregations.

"The church's witness must be an open witness and if there is a partnership between some of our churchmen and, for example, the ANCMission-in-Exile, then that partnership must be an open and proclaimed partnership which is stripped of the hypocrisy which talks in terms of distinguishing between the spiritual needs of insurgents and the intent to kill for political purposes which directs them..."

Chief Buthelezi said that he was "totally convinced" that if ever violence in South Africa was to be judged as "just retributive violence", that judgement could only be made after every stone of non-violent action had been turned over and after every Christian

act of reconciliation had failed.

There were, he added, still a great many stones to turn over.

"There is still profound hope, born out of Christian commitment in my heart, that while we may be failing in South Africa, we have not yet finally failed. There are things to do which we must do, which we and others before us have failed to do."

In the context of this thinking, Chief Buthelezi went on to express his dismay to Archbishop Runcie that the

denied there was any possibility that constituency politics — attempting to penetrate the institutional life of South Africa — had an important role to play.

They branded those who were involved as "collaborators."

However, non-participation as a principle lead to confronting apartheid society from without and was the domain of those who employed violence.

"I believed that there is an urgent need now for international Christian agencies to look carefully at the implications of non-participation," he added.

"Assessments should be made of the extent to which the Church in any society must necessarily be a participant in the institutions of that society if the spirit of Christ is to be spread across the fabric of society."

Chief Buthelezi said he was in daily contact with South Africa's suffering Black masses. Every day he was made intimately and deeply aware of Black suffering and the anguish it produced.

He was "deeply aware" of the anger which had been generated by this suffering — as much as anybody else in the country.

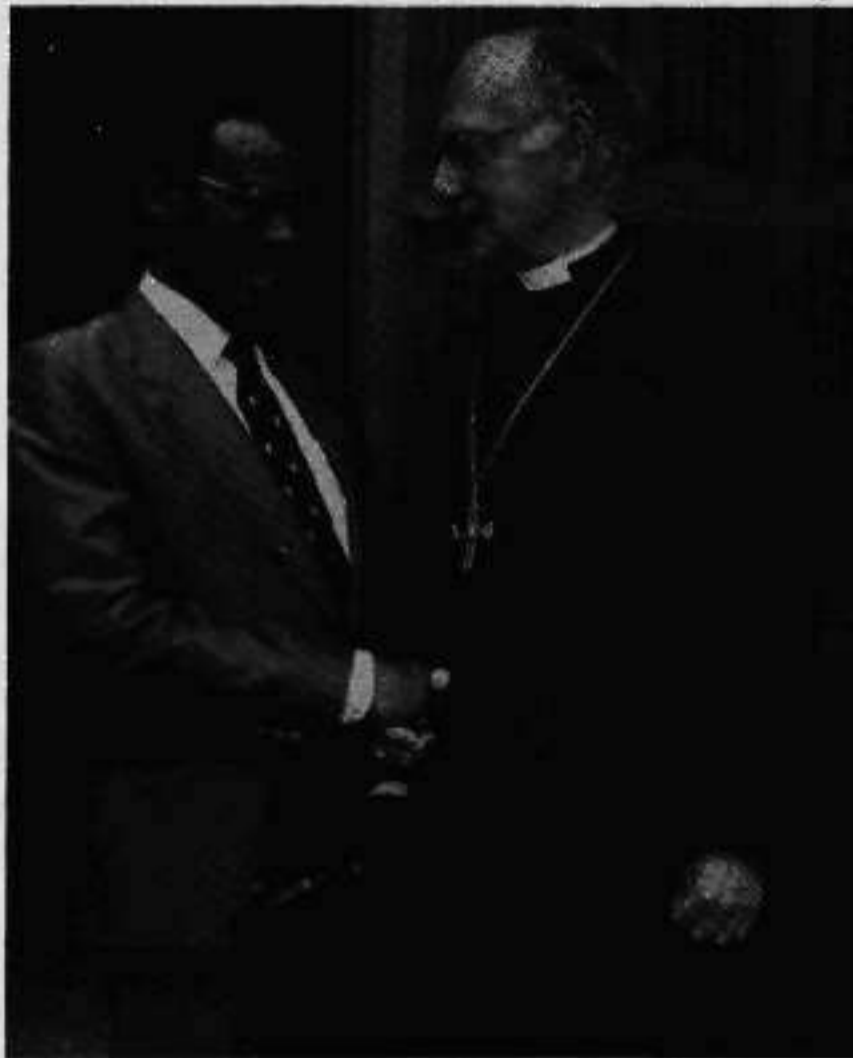
"I understand the forces which are generating violent reactions to apartheid. For me you cannot claim that the Church has failed to be correctly involved in the process of bringing about change and in the same breath justify the violence which is consequent on that failure in theological terms..."

When travelling abroad, Chief Buthelezi said he often found himself in discussions with those who could not understand why Blacks, who had suffered so terribly under the yoke of apartheid, were not drawn together in common cause by their shared political, social and economic deprivation.

"They do not understand that the intensity of suffering, and the anger which flows from it, heightens political debate among Blacks.

"It deepens differences of opinion and dramatises these differences in opposing political action."

Blacks in South Africa who were



The Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of All England and Metropolitan, the Most Rev. and Right Hon. Robert Runcie, with Chief Buthelezi

forces working for violent confrontation in South Africa "are so often rewarded with Christian acclaim in the Western world..."

Meanwhile, those who were struggling on the ground to salvage the country from a consuming fire of violence, and who were pursuing aims and objectives by popular Black demand, were stigmatized as "sell-outs" because they spoke out against the employment of violence...

Inkatha, for instance, had received no encouragement from the British Council of Churches for the role it had played in fighting apartheid.

There were vast political differences between groups in the country. Some

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politically involved had deep convictions about the merits of the various courses of action open to them.

These courses of action were about life and death issues and there was a lot at stake. Because there was no consensus about what could and what should be done, every dispute about tactics and strategies was intensified.

"Also, because every action of a political nature aimed at bringing about political change is put under police surveillance, all Black leaders in the struggle for liberation experience one or another form of intimidation.

"Only those who believe fervently in what they are doing find the strength and resolve to carry on," Chief Buthelezi continued.

"The leadership which does not rise up to meet oppression and to defy intimidation, is only found among those who have a single-minded purposefulness which is not always an asset for debate and the politics of reconciliation."

Not only were there stark issues to be faced in life and death issues in a complex situation in which there was little consensus, but action on the part of the State continually disrupted the democratic process by which people selected their leaders and exercised choices among options.

"The jailing and detention of leaders and the intimidation and the banning of organisations destroys the whole process by which people eventually get together in positions in which there is a multitude of choices."

Action by successive National Party governments over the last 37 years had so disrupted the democratic process for so long that Chief Buthelezi said he feared for the future.

"This fear has driven me to be intensely democratic in my own approach and has led me to do everything in my power to make Inkatha a democratic organisation," he added.

"After the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1961, there was a widely felt despair in South Africa about the merits of constituency politics and the utility of membership-based organisations.

"After the massive crackdown and the jailing of hundreds of Black leaders, those who escaped the net either went underground or fled the country to act as leaders in exile.

"It was only in the mid-1970's that the perceived failure of underground leadership and leadership in exile led ordinary Black South Africans to once again demand visible political organisations. It was in the years of the early seventies that both Inkatha and the Black People's Convention emerged to fill the vacuum that had been created by police brutality."

Chief Buthelezi then described to Archbishop Runcie how he established Inkatha to pursue the "hallowed" aims and objectives of the old ANC which was founded in 1912.

The Black People's Convention, he added, was essentially established as a protest political movement which was not membership-based and this "duality" in Black politics had persisted ever since.

Inkatha was today the only membership-based Black political movement in the country.

"That Black South Africans feel the need for a democratic membership-based organisation is shown by the fact that in the short space of ten years, Inkatha has grown to have a card carrying membership of over one million people..."

It was significant that when the growth pattern of Inkatha was studied, it was found that its growth surged after protest politics produced confrontations and violence which were crushed by police.

People were left counting the cost of this confrontation in terms of lives and property — and assessing these costs against gains made.

"During the 1976-1977 period of violent unrest in South Africa, when Inkatha was a year old, a great many friends warned me that I should abandon what I am doing because Inkatha had no future in an angry South Africa which demanded immediate political action for immediate gain..."

"I was again and again told that if I was to survive as a political leader, I would have to relinquish my position as Chief Minister of KwaZulu and would have to join in with other leaders in the protest movement.

"It was during 1977-78 that Inkatha doubled its membership and this pat-

tern of upward surges of Inkatha membership after violent confrontations has been evidenced ever since."

All Inkatha's policies, all its tactics and strategies, and all its leaders were decided upon by the movement's annual general conference.

No stance was taken, either at home or abroad, which was not dictated by Inkatha's mass membership.

It was therefore "with a solid Black mandate" that Chief Buthelezi told the Archbishop of Canterbury that Black South Africa's first option was an option to pursue non-violent democratic tactics and strategies in opposition to apartheid.

Black South Africans were aware of the fact that the ANC Mission-in-Exile had been pursuing an armed struggle for 25 years without any tangible evidence that they would ever succeed.

Black South Africa was also aware that the South African government commanded the mightiest police and army force on the continent of Africa and that it would not hesitate to use its full might — both within the country and across the length and breadth of Southern Africa.

"The fact that the majority of Black South Africans would only turn to violence if all else failed has always given me the courage to continue in my pursuit of non-violent solutions," Chief Buthelezi continued.

"As a Christian, I am deeply convinced that ... while there is as yet one stone unturned in the pursuit of non-violent tactics and strategies, there is no Christian justification for the pursuit of objectives through violence."

He was aware, however, that there was a body of theological opinion in Christendom which was beginning to look at violence as a necessary instrument of God in bringing about the downfall of unjust Governments.

The recent call by the Western Cape region of the South African Council of Churches for Christians to pray for the downfall of the government on June 16 was an example.

In this time in South Africa's history, Chief Buthelezi said the Anglican Church in particular had an historic role to play.

"While the Church of the Province of South Africa is guided by God Almighty as a separate entity, it is nevertheless true that it has historic links with the British which in the Act of Union established apartheid South Africa after having ruled as a colonial power..."